

**The Report of the
Accreditation Visiting Team**

**Olympus Junior High School
2217 East 4800 South
Holladay, Utah 84117**

April 20-21, 2004



Utah State Office of Education
250 East 500 South
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**THE REPORT OF THE
VISITING TEAM REVIEWING**

**Olympus Junior High School
2217 East 4800 South
Holladay, Utah 84117**

April 20-21,2004

UTAH STATE OFFICE OF EDUCATION

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FOREWORD

A major purpose of the accreditation process is to stimulate inservice growth and school improvement. Consequently, requirements include not only meeting the standards of the Utah State Office of Education, but also completing a school evaluation every six years.

School evaluation is that effort by the local school staff to take a comprehensive look at the school's program, operation, and effect. The school determines how closely its purposes and philosophy coincide with its actual practices and the degree to which its stated objectives are being reached. It is a three-phased program: (1) self-evaluation, (2) on-site evaluation by an external team of educators, and (3) implementation using units of the evaluation to improve the school by effecting thoughtful change.

The evaluation, April 20-21, 2004, was conducted because of the school's desire to ensure quality education for all students in the school, and to meet the requirements referred to above.

The entire staff of Olympus Junior High School is commended for the time and effort devoted to studying and evaluating the various facets of the total program and to preparing the materials used by the Visiting Team. The excellent leadership given by Principal Ben Lems is commended.

The staff and administration are congratulated for the generally fine program being provided for Olympus Junior High School students, and also for the professional attitude of all members of the group, which made it possible for them to see areas of weakness and strength and to suggest procedures for bringing about improvements.

While these recommendations may be used to solicit financial support to acquire some of the materials, equipment, and services needed to carry out a more effective program, it is even more important that the faculty and administration utilize them as they continue to evaluate and modify course offerings and administrative and classroom procedures to more adequately meet the needs of the students of Olympus Junior High School.

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**Board of Regents Appointments*

10/30/03

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Paul S. Sagers	Assistant Superintendent; Program Services
Tim Dyson	Director, School Services

OLYMPUS JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL

ADMINISTRATION AND STAFF

School Administration

Ben Lems Principal
Mary Anne Stevens Assistant Principal

Counseling

Susan Harbertson Counselor
Robin Raine Counselor
Thrella Walk Counselor

Support Staff

Kris Lemon Principal Secretary
Glenda Holt Financial Secretary
Lani Anderson Counseling Secretary
Brenda Dahle Comprehensive Guidance Assistant
Amy Hofheins Tracker
Anna Hofheins Behavioral Health Aide
Dona Lundquist Media Aide
Mindy McQueen Resource Aide
Jeanne Buhler Cafeteria Assistant
Tracy Burgdorf Cafeteria Assistant
Marilyn Carter Cafeteria Assistant
Gloria Paulsen Cafeteria Manager
Chris Simmonds Cafeteria Assistant
Terry Birch Assistant Custodian
Yvonne Christensen Assistant Custodian
Cory Oberhansley Assistant Custodian
Deena Smoker Assistant Custodian
Steve Snider Head Custodian

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Andrew McIntyre

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Tiffany M. Nichols
Jeanette Pack
Belisario Provoste

Pam K. Sanders
Colleen Schmid
Stevern R. Schwemmer
Kerry V. Selk
Alan Thomas
Cheryl Walker
Bruce Whitaker

OLYMPUS JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL

MISSION STATEMENT

The mission of Olympus Junior High is to prepare students to become life-long learners, and servants of humanity.

BELIEF STATEMENTS

We believe in an educational community...

Where all students can learn

Where each person is a valued individual with unique needs

Where there is respect for self, others, school, and country

That is positive, that is safe and where even mistakes are opportunities for growth

That encourages open, honest, and constructive communication

Where each student develops habits and skills for life-long learning, contributing to society and serving humanity

MEMBERS OF THE VISITING TEAM

Andrew Odoardi, Salt Lake City School District, Visiting Team Chairperson

Michael Goodman, Mount Jordan Middle School, Jordan School District

Barry Jones, South Ogden Junior High School, Weber School District

Garrick Peterson, Lakeridge Junior High School, Alpine School District

VISITING TEAM REPORT
OLYMPUS JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL

CHAPTER 1: SCHOOL PROFILE

Olympus Junior High School serves the Holladay area in Granite School District. The new building was first occupied in May of 2003. Enrollment in the past few years has held steady at approximately 850 students, with a faculty of thirty-five teachers.

The school is in the process of implementing middle school practices and preparing to transition to the block schedule for the coming school year.

a) What significant findings were revealed by the school's analysis of its profile?

Olympus Junior High School offers evidence of the strength of the self-study process by the way in which the faculty, staff, and community developed and shared their respective insights as a result of their involvement. They are to be commended for their example of collaboration.

Analysis of the data reveals the school's consistent performance on the State Criterion-Referenced Tests (CRTs). The reporting of the data based on gender, ethnicity, and special needs assisted the school in identifying specific student populations that are in need of additional support. In discussions with the administration and school leadership, it was evident that the staff has initiated the process of collecting student data and using that data to make decisions regarding school improvement goals, staff development needs, and allocation of resources. The staff did examine GPA data in considering appropriate student learning goals. The staff exhibited a good sense of knowing who is and is not learning in the school.

It is important to note that much of the data analyses and description of school practices and programs was embedded in the focus group reports. Both the departmental analyses and the focus group analyses provide a clear sense of the school's working knowledge about the directions to follow for continuing school improvement efforts in fostering student learning.

b) What modifications to the school profile should the school consider for the future?

Olympus Junior High School recognizes the need to continue its efforts to systematically collect and analyze pertinent student data to guide decisions made by the school.

All agree that the data need to be disaggregated into a user-friendly format that is relevant, and also delivered to the school in a timely fashion.

It is suggested that the school collaborate with the district in designing an effective data management system that can be utilized by different stakeholders within the school community. This effort should extend to disaggregating both state and national norm-referenced test data by content cluster, gender, grade level, and ethnicity.

Suggested Areas for Further Inquiry:

- In order to identify specific student achievement targets, both the Utah State Core Tests and SAT data should be disaggregated by content cluster and for each grade level and, if possible, by gender and ethnicity. The Visiting Team encourages the faculty to continue its work to integrate its knowledge of individual student data into its practice
- The staff should consider reexamining the school survey data and comparing satisfaction levels of students and parents **by department**. This comparison would allow each department to set performance goals/standards for the department and work collaboratively to achieve these goals.

CHAPTER 2: THE SELF-STUDY PROCESS

- a) *To what extent has the school community engaged in a collaborative self-study process on behalf of students?*

The Olympus Junior High School leadership team made a concerted effort to engage all stakeholder groups in a collaborative self-study process. A leadership team consisting of staff members and parents facilitated the process. The leadership team facilitated the staff's analysis of student achievement data and survey results, crafted the school's mission and belief statements, and identified school improvement goals, which were prioritized in the development of the action plans.

The degree of student participation in the processes of the self-study is commendable.

In interviewing staff members, parents, and students involved in the process, it was apparent that several stakeholders still have questions regarding how the DRSLs and action plans will drive the work of the school in the future. As a result, the administration and leadership team need to ensure that all stakeholders

are aware of and endorse the school's action plans and the recommendations from the Visiting Team.

- b) *To what extent does the school's self-study accurately reflect the school's current strengths and limitations?*

Information presented in the school's self-study focused predominately on the results of the student/parent perception survey, student achievement data (SAT/CRTs), and focus groups that were formed to address teacher/parent/staff concerns.

The work done in the departments reflects a significant effort to identify areas of strength and limitations. The individual departmental analyses need to be integrated into a broader, schoolwide set of strengths and limitations tied to the desired results for student learning, and find expression in the action plans.

Secondly, while the departments made some effort to link their work to the desired results for student learning, they clearly understand the need to address how they will assess student learning relative to the desired results for student learning.

While the staff of Olympus Junior High School recognizes its strengths as effective educators, it remains willing to endorse the concept of continuous improvement and professional growth on behalf of the students. The faculty and leadership have demonstrated how the effective use of the self-study processes has disposed them to gain the skills to accurately identify student achievement gaps, reflect on current educational practices, and examine schoolwide practices.

CHAPTER 3: INSTRUCTIONAL AND ORGANIZATIONAL EFFECTIVENESS

Olympus Junior High School's desired results for student learning (DRSLs) are as follows:

1. Lifelong Learners
2. Effective Communicators
3. Respectful Citizens
4. Ethical Persons
5. Servants of Humanity
6. Assured Individuals

Shared Vision, Beliefs, Mission, and Goals:

- a) *To what extent did the school facilitate a collaborative process to build a shared vision for the school (mission) that defines a compelling purpose and direction for the school?*

The interviews with staff members and students affirmed that the administration and the leadership team assumed the primary responsibility for developing the school's beliefs and mission statement. Other stakeholders, such as teachers, parents, and community members had systematic and ongoing opportunities to provide input and feedback through the consensus-building process to define the school's mission.

There was a very concerted and enthusiastic effort to involve all stakeholders in using the mission and belief statements in decisions pertaining to school culture, classroom instruction, and the development of the DRSLs.

- b) *To what extent has the school defined a set of beliefs that reflect the commitment of the administration and staff to support student achievement and success?*

The belief statements are well-thought-out, support the mission statement, and guide the DRSLs. The belief statements clearly reflect the commitment of the school to support student achievement and success.

- c) *To what extent do the school's mission and beliefs align to support the school's desired results for student learning (DRSLs)?*

The mission and belief statements are nicely aligned with the DRSLs. The desired results for student learning (DRSLs) were identified through a process that included teacher, parent, and student input, as well as the analysis of student performance results.

Throughout the narratives of the departmental analyses and the focus groups, there is clear evidence of attention to the issue of alignment of curricula, instruction, and the DRSLs with the mission and belief statements.

Curriculum Development:

- a) *To what extent does the staff work collaboratively to ensure the curriculum is based on clearly defined standards and the Utah Core Curriculum (with inclusion of the Utah Life Skills)?*

The faculty is familiar with the Utah Core Curriculum. Some collaboration between departments has taken place to integrate Core concepts. The Visiting Team feels that a more definitive reference to the Utah Life Skills curriculum will

enhance the implementation of the DRSLs by providing the indicators of student performance.

Articulation has begun around what is most essential in the State Core. There is a strong desire among some staff members to collaborate around integrated curricula and instructional strategies. The Visiting Team suggests that the staff continue to find time and methods for integrating core concepts across all content areas and grade levels.

There is a clear sense of the alignments that currently exist both with the Core Curriculum and with DRSLs, as reported in the departmental analyses. The faculty should continue this process by coordinating key concepts among departments. Moving forward with teaming will support the desired focus on essential concepts while meeting the individual needs of students.

- b) *To what extent does the teaching staff work collaboratively to support the development of a curriculum that focuses on the school's desired results for student learning?*

The desired results for student learning are not clearly reflected in what is happening in the classrooms. Increasing schoolwide understanding of criteria for selecting the desired results for students learning (DRSLs) will enable the school community to have a clearer focus around curriculum and instruction. The DRSLs are broad enough to encompass and reinforce the effective practices already occurring at the school. The beginning stages of a schoolwide focus are emerging and need to be formalized into a schoolwide plan. Clarifying and refining specific action steps connected to the DRSLs will help drive this plan. Staff members reflect a disposition to collaboration that will serve them well as the school moves to a block schedule.

Quality Instructional Design:

- a) *To what extent does the professional staff design and implement a variety of learning experiences that actively engage students?*

School staff members were observed using a “variety” of teaching strategies to enhance student learning. The Visiting Team observed direct instruction, labs in the science area, cross-curricular projects, project-based activities, educational games, cooperative learning, hands-on (manipulative) activities, and individual student learning.

Students also expressed concern with the number of large projects or assignments due at similar times in many of their classes. Communication among departments and teachers would be a solution. The Visiting Team is not recommending that

teachers eliminate these projects or assignments, but that they work with each other so that students do not feel overwhelmed.

The Visiting Team compliments the efforts of those teachers who understand and use a wide variety of research-based “best practices.”

- b) *To what extent does the professional staff employ a variety of instructional strategies to ensure the needs of different learners are met?*

The faculty has given serious attention to the need to recognize and accommodate the range of student learning styles that are encountered in every classroom. The Visiting Team suggests that the faculty continue to collectively research and expand the use of multiple teaching strategies and instructional delivery options to meet the variety of the needs of all students through the use of differentiated instruction.

- c) *To what extent do the professional staff and leadership provide additional opportunities which support student learning?*

There are a variety of programs to support student learning in addition to the regular classroom. The MORE program, Directed Studies, and the After School Homework Program, along with the accessibility of faculty members before and after school, academic and attendance tracking, and extracurricular activities clearly reflect the additional opportunities for student learning. The staff is encouraged to investigate the effectiveness of these programs in meeting student needs, as well as whether or not all groups of students are able to take advantage of these support structures.

Quality Assessment Systems:

- a) *To what extent has the staff developed classroom or school wide assessments based on clearly articulated expectations for student achievement?*

There is no established schoolwide assessment or grading structure. Specific assessments and their uses in grading are left up to individual teachers, who exhibit great diversity in types of assessment. There is no reported data from teachers on what type of assessment is best to establish what the students are learning.

Schoolwide expectations and assessments related to the desired results for student learning had not been articulated at the time of the accreditation site visit. Attention to methods of assessment linked to indicators and standards should shape the action plan item recommended by the Visiting Team as work for the near future.

- b) *To what extent are assessments of student learning developed using methods that reflect the intended purpose and performance standards?*

The staff uses traditional formal assessments, in the form of tests and quizzes, to assess students. Other types of formal assessment have been noted, such as PowerPoint presentations, group presentations, video productions, etc. The school is to be commended for its incorporation of a variety of formal assessment methods that are based on best practices and attention to student learning styles.

The Visiting Team also saw many incidents of informal assessment. These varied by class, but included student oral responses (individual and whole class), teachers checking student work and providing feedback as students were working, students working in groups, etc.

The staff members at Olympus Junior High School also use the results of standardized tests to guide them in improving their educational product. The state schoolwide assessments (SAT and CRTs) are given for three clearly articulated purposes: to evaluate student learning and adjust instruction to meet the needs of students, to identify strengths and deficits, and to evaluate progress toward Comprehensive School Improvement Plan goals. It is recommended the data be disaggregated for better understanding of who is learning and who isn't.

Greater collaboration within the educational community of Olympus Junior High School will strengthen the staff's ability to further develop consistent schoolwide assessment expectations.

- c) *To what extent are assessments designed, developed, and used in a fair and equitable manner?*

The Visiting Team is confident that the staff is committed to fair and equitable assessment of student performance. However, according to the focus group recommendations, assessment needs to be improved.

Interviews with students reflected the sense of fairness students felt regarding individual teachers' grading practices. There is no schoolwide grading policy.

There is ongoing school administrative support and training to facilitate access to and use of student performance data. There is a strong desire among the administration and staff to receive and learn to use timely and accurate data in order to better serve the needs of all students. The staff understands that using data leads them to better instructional decisions.

Leadership for School Improvement:

- a) *To what extent does the school leadership promote quality instruction by fostering an academic learning climate and actively supporting teaching and learning?*

The leadership of Olympus Junior High School has focused professional development efforts on the implementation of “best practices” and middle school philosophy. The staff members have been encouraged to attend seminars, conferences, and other professional development opportunities, and to implement research-based, effective instructional strategies gleaned from these opportunities.

The school has established a strong and positive learning environment in which teaching and learning are actively supported. There is a culture of high expectations for students and staff. The school maintains a constant and steady focus on student learning. The depth of the school’s commitment to improving student learning is clearly evident. Student and staff accomplishments are recognized.

- b) *To what extent does the school leadership employ effective decision making that is data-driven, research-based, and collaborative?*

The leadership of Olympus Junior High is learning to employ data-driven, research-based decision making. Currently, the lack of sufficient data regarding student achievement limits the school’s ability to triangulate data in its decision making process. Although data is limited, the administration is cognizant of the need to collect pertinent information—not only to improve the decision-making process, but also to monitor school improvement efforts.

The Visiting Team recommends that the school use the NSSE rubrics, in addition to the study of “best practices” by all classroom teachers, to provide a common focus and language for continuing improvement efforts.

- c) *To what extent does the school leadership monitor progress in student achievement and instructional effectiveness through a comprehensive assessment system and continuous reflection?*

The leadership of Olympus Junior High does not have a comprehensive assessment system in place at this time. The development of a comprehensive assessment system linked to the DRSLs will be one of the school’s major tasks as it works to implement the recommendations of the focus groups and the Visiting Team.

- d) *To what extent does the school leadership provide skillful stewardship by ensuring management of the organization, operations, and resources of the school for a safe, efficient, and effective learning environment?*

Parents, students, and staff members repeatedly commended the school's leadership for improving the school's climate and culture. Schoolwide policies and operational procedures are consistent with the school's beliefs and mission and are designed to support student learning. The allocation and use of resources are aligned with school goals.

- e) *To what extent does the school leadership make decisions related to the allocation and use of resources which align with the school goals, the achievement of the DRSLs, and school improvement efforts?*

Olympus Junior High is in the initial stages of implementing and refining its desired results for student learning, establishing school goals, and identifying appropriate improvement steps. The school leadership is committed to put into place a process for ensuring the allocation and use of resources that are aligned with the school goals or the achievement of the DRSLs. The leadership has fostered a learning community of adults, faculty and staff members that models the school's efforts to establish a learning environment for students in the classroom.

- f) *To what extent does the school leadership empower the school community and encourage commitment, participation, collaboration, and shared responsibility for student learning?*

The Visiting Team recognizes the positive and productive relationships that exist among students, teachers, support staff, and administrators. There is strong evidence that the school has created and sustained a learning environment for students that nurtures a sense of caring and belonging. The Visiting Team encourages the staff to continue its efforts to collaborate across departments in order to foster collegiality and provide cross-curricular connections for students.

The administrative team recognizes and empowers staff members, parents, and students to share in the responsibilities of leadership. In doing so, the administration encourages commitment, participation, and collaboration. The administration is encouraged to continue building the knowledge, skills, and expertise of the staff to employ data-driven and research-based decision making. A lack of sufficient data and/or understanding of research-based best practices is evident in several of the departmental reports, focus group reports, and action plan goals.

Community Building:

- a) *To what extent does the school foster community building and working relationships within the school?*

The Visiting Team observed several incidences of positive and productive working relationships at Olympus Junior High, and especially commends the members of the Math Department for their self-motivated departmental curriculum planning and teaming. Parents and students served on every focus group and were complimentary and supportive of the teachers and administration. Students expressed respect and appreciation for their teachers and stated to Visiting Team members that their teachers are genuinely concerned about the students and student learning. The decision to move to a block schedule to better implement the district-mandated Middle Level Philosophy was a result of collaboration among the administration, teachers, PTSA, and Community Council. The grade level teams are enthusiastic about the collaborative planning time that will be gained with the new block schedule.

- b) *To what extent does the school extend the school community through collaborative networks that support student learning?*

The school has demonstrated commitment to building a collaborative network of support within the school community, and seeks to engage parents, families, and community business partners in support of learning activities. The school has a website where parents and students may check individual class assignments and the school activities calendar, and a monthly newsletter sponsored by the PTSA is sent home to every family. Parents may access their children's grades and attendance records through the Granite District website. Over several years, 96 percent of the parents have participated with their students in creating SEOPs. Olympus Junior High School has three active parent groups: the Community Council, the PTSA and the Honor Committee. The school has eight community business partners that provide volunteer tutors, guest speakers, sponsorship of science fairs and other activities, funds for materials and equipment, and rewards for teachers, parent volunteers, and student programs.

Culture of Continuous Improvement and Learning:

- a) *To what extent does the school build skills and the capacity for improvement through comprehensive and ongoing professional development programs focused on the school's goals for improvement?*

Of the 40 certified staff members at Olympus Junior High School, eighteen have advanced degrees. Six teachers have an ESL endorsement. The faculty and administration have been active in participating in schoolwide in-service workshops in preparation for implementing a block schedule and the Middle School Philosophy. The school has paid for eight teachers to attend the National Middle Level Conference, and for several teachers to attend Utah Middle School Conferences. There has also been departmental training in preparation for the impending changes at the school.

- b) *To what extent does the school create conditions that support productive change and continuous improvement?*

The administration, faculty, PTSA, and Community Council have done a great deal of hard work in preparing the self-study, and each has expressed commitment to the need for productive change and continuous improvement in facilitating the school DRSLs and school improvement plan to affect student learning. Some students are aware of the school's DRSLs, and many teachers are incorporating some elements of the DRSLs in their lessons. However, measureable indicators do not yet support the DRSLs, so there is little impact as yet on student outcomes. This will need to be addressed as the school revisits its self-study and moves forward through the school improvement plan.

CHAPTER 4: NORTHWEST ASSOCIATION OF ACCREDITED SCHOOLS (NAAS) STANDARDS I-XI

This chapter is not applicable to Olympus Junior High School. Most public junior/middle schools are not accredited by the NAAS, but only by the USOE – it is their choice to join the NAAS or not.

CHAPTER 5: SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT EFFORTS – ACTION PLAN

- a) *To what extent is the schoolwide action plan adequate in addressing the critical areas for follow-up?*

The action plans address the major concerns identified by the staff and reflected in the profile data. The plans effectively address critical areas for improvement and practice as the school moves to more fully implement middle level practices. The entire staff is encouraged to focus its efforts on those areas articulated in the action plans that will have a direct impact on student learning.

- b) *To what extent is there sufficient commitment to the action plan, schoolwide and system-wide?*

It was evident to the Visiting Team that the leadership team and administration, as well as many of the teaching staff, share a strong commitment to the action plans.

However, it was apparent that some members of the faculty are not fully committed to addressing the school's DRSLs and recognizing the impact that implementing the DRSLs will have upon classroom instruction and assessment.

The action plans need to incorporate a focus for their outcomes on the DRSLs. The administration and leadership team will need to secure the commitment of the staff to attending to the DRSLs before they proceed to implement the action plans and Visiting Team recommendations.

- c) *How sound does the follow-up process that the school intends to use for monitoring the accomplishments of the schoolwide action plan appear to be?*

In order to evaluate its effectiveness, the leadership still needs to identify what data and evidence should be collected and periodically analyzed by the school leadership team and faculty. The Visiting Team suggests incremental benchmarks and analyses of how the data from the findings has affected instructional strategies, instructional delivery, and curriculum content.

CHAPTER 6: MAJOR COMMENDATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE VISITING TEAM

Commendations:

- The Visiting Team recognizes that the school and leadership team made a sincere effort to do a thorough analysis of the school's strengths and limitations, and commends them for this effort. The attention to the language of the self-study process is exemplary.
- The Visiting Team commends the faculty for its willingness to work in a block schedule and implement middle level practice.
- The administration is to be commended for their support of the staff and their willingness to share the leadership of the school with the stakeholders.
- The staff and administration are to be commended for their conscious and diligent efforts in creating a positive culture and climate conducive to teaching and learning.
- The staff and administration are to be commended for continued efforts in identifying the needs of students, and in creating a positive community image for Olympus Junior High School. This image includes providing a safe learning environment, holding high expectations for student learning, and having a staff characterized by caring educators willing to do whatever is necessary to help students succeed.

Recommendations:

- The Visiting Team recommends that staff members and stakeholders revisit the DRSLs in order to:
 - Increase levels of commitment among the staff.
 - Identify measurable indicators as a foundation for formal assessments in order to monitor and measure student achievement of the DRSLs.
- The Visiting Team recommends increased emphasis on differentiated instruction and a corresponding curriculum that will allow the increased time for instruction in the block schedule to be used to its fullest potential.
- The Visiting Team recommends that the school develop an effective data collection and management system that can be utilized to provide reliable data for making judgments regarding academic growth by individual students or groups of students. This effort should extend to disaggregating both state and national norm-referenced test data by content cluster, gender, grade level, ethnicity, etc.
- The Visiting Team recommends that Olympus Junior High School strive to more clearly align the action plans to address findings resulting from the data analysis linked to student learning and implementation of the DRSLs.
- The Visiting Team recommends that the administration and staff continue to seek innovative ways of increasing opportunities for teachers to collaborate, share best practices, and implement the school's action plans. The school needs to engage the whole staff in collaborative inquiry with regard to the school's DRSLs. This would include:
 - Working to increase schoolwide understanding of the purposes for and criteria used in selecting the DRSLs.
 - Posting the DRSLs as expectations.